DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 891 CS 509 405

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TITLE Unifying Instructional Research and Teaching: The Role of the Basic Course Director.
PUB DATE 1995-00-00
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (81st, San Antonio, TX, November 18-21, 1995).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Research; Communication Skills; Higher Education; Instructional Improvement; Instructional Innovation; *Introductory Courses; *Speech Communication; *Student Needs; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS Applied Communication; Speech Communication Education

ABSTRACT

Since students learn conceptually, the basic speech course should be more than a skills course. Skills are the mechanics of speaking; teaching only skills tends to produce mechanical speakers. Basic course instructions need to continue to address skills, but must also address concepts. Concepts come from research, and the emphasis of the basic course should be that speech communications is a discipline steeped in research. Research should be brought into the basic speech course in three ways: (1) as preparation for the course--the basic course instructor as a consumer and implementer of research; (2) as course content--research as part of the content of the course (content and procedural knowledge); and (3) as a teaching strategy--instructor implements what has been learned about communication and explicitly talks about the implementation such that students "see" it as well as talk about it. (Contains 16 references.) (Author/AA)

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ED 461 891

Unifying Instructional Research and Teaching: The Role of the Basic Course Director

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CS 509405

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Unifying Instructional Research and Teaching: The Role of the Basic Course Director

Since students learn conceptually, the basic course should be more than a skills course. Skills are the mechanics of speaking, teaching only skills tends to produce mechanical speakers. We need to continue to address skills but also address concepts. And concepts come from research. The emphasis of the basic course should be that speech communication is a discipline steeped in research. This is not a new idea, it's been done before, the question is how successfully it has been done. The instructor is a presenter with a specific purpose. Is the instructor aware of verbal and nonverbal proximity? If not, s/he is not making the best practice of it and this is problematic. The instructor also needs to talk about it explicitly. Research needs to be part of the instructional practice and part of the course content (Daly, Friedrich, & Vangelisti, 1990). Research should be brought into the basic course in three ways:

1. As preparation for the course--the basic course instructor as a consumer and implementer of research;
2. As course content--research as part of the content of the course (content knowledge and procedural knowledge);
3. As a teaching strategy--instructors implements what we have learned about communication and explicitly talks about the implementation such that students "see" it as well as talk about it.

Traditionally we have viewed research as content, i.e., students should read and discuss studies. While this is important we should consider conceptualizing research in the basic course as curriculum. Walker (1990) posits three central concepts in defining curriculum: content, purpose, and organization. Curriculum is what gets taught, how it gets taught, and how it gets learned. It is what teachers and students attend together, what is recognized as important to learn, and the manner in which this all is organized. Thinking about the basic course curriculum versus course content offers a broader approach to integrating research.

On the teacher level, then, research becomes a pedagogical consideration for the instructor. Instructor knowledge of research regarding instruction, learning, presentations, and communication apprehension, becomes a necessary part of decisions about organizing the course. Research on teacher behaviors offers advice to the basic course instructor. Use of humor, communicator style, verbal and nonverbal immediacy, BATs and BAMs, and many other constructs have been well researched. The basic course instructor ought to be well versed in the instructional research available that offers our best scholarly knowledge of effective teaching. Civikly (1992) suggests that instructors view clarity as a relational process (Eisenberg, 1984), not merely as a teacher attribute. The teacher, students, and the message all contribute to instructional clarity.

Sprague (1992) argues, however, that it is time we move beyond the model of teacher as technician and see teachers as intellectuals. The intellectual teacher is a "transformative intellectual" who is not merely concerned with giving students knowledge and skills. Teachers must reflect on their own practice; research which informs about teaching practice should be part of the instructor's repertoire. Zeuli (1992) notes that reading research is an important component of teachers' professional development. The basic course instructor is a **teacher** of communication. Only rarely do those who teach the basic course have the basic course as their area of inquiry for their own research. Thus, the basic course instructor not only needs to read and conduct research about her/his personal area of inquiry and learning, but also instructional research which informs her/him about instructional practices better enabling the instructor to communicate the knowledge and skills of the field. In this way, research becomes integrated in the course through the development of the instructor as a teacher and intellectual leader of the class.

The basic course instructor potentially can draw from the field of instructional communication, communication, and education, as well as, public speaking, interpersonal and group communication to fortify her/his teaching and learning. Book (1989) reiterates that researchers in education call for teachers to be firmly grounded in their content knowledge and argues that teachers of communication on all levels need a rich understanding of the history of the discipline and the methodologies used to study communication phenomenon. Teachers who possess such knowledge can provide the necessary intellectual leadership for their classes.

More than a decade ago Deethardt (1982) argued that speech communication must become futurized, civilized, politicized, and globalized. Accordingly, teachers and students must deal with increasing cultural diversity, an increasing number of impersonal relationships, political participation, and models of time and progress. Deethardt rejects the typical style of instruction in which students are given generalizations as "truths" rather than made objects of search and discovery. Coupled with Sprague's (1992) argument for a critical pedagogical approach, we should revisit and revise the pedagogical and instructional mission of speech communication. Book (1989) takes issue with the power and appropriateness of the instructional activities students experience in communication. She asks us to ask ourselves if we are engaging students in analyzing theory and principles of communication. We need to examine the ways in which we stimulate students to think about the discipline of communication by the ways in which we implicitly or explicitly represent the discipline to them.

Where does this lead us and what does it have to do with research? Buerkel-Rothfuss, Gray, and Yerby (1993) address issues in which students often times feel that the content of

communication courses is "obvious" or "natural". They posit that communication theory and research should be applied to students' communication experiences and abilities. Building on their idea, part of the answer to the "so what?" question is that communication content may seem natural and obvious to students because it is not often problematized. Like Deethardt's (1982) point that we hand down generalizations. If we make explicit that speech communication is grounded in research that raises questions and addresses societal issues, we move from the speech as art model into the speech as intellectual inquiry model. This increases the potential for integrating research into the basic course. Research becomes the avenue for students to engage in the questions, issues addressed in the field. Students will then begin to grapple with those questions and issues when research becomes part of the content of the course. Students also begin to participate in the discourse of the discipline when examining the questions and issues of the discipline.

If, as Book (1989) suggests, part of the public speaking emphasis ought to be speaking about real issues, then inquiry (research) becomes part of the method and knowledge of public speaking. If students are expected to explore real world issues and questions, then part of the skill becomes investigating questions, issues, and challenging perspectives. Research methods can become a model for such student inquiry and thus become integrated into the basic course. For example, Vonnegut (1992) argues we lack, and therefore need to address, including women's rhetoric in American public address. Traditional courses have lacked the range of rhetorical texts. Her challenge to traditional is the feminist revisionist argument which is loaded with potential debate and inquiry as an issue in public speaking.

Returning to Sprague's (1992) critical perspective, two concepts from critical pedagogy, "voice" and "public" have utility for the public speaking course (Giroux, 1988a, 1988b, 1992). We often allow/require students to give speeches on topics which are not a part of and/or important to their own life experience. The speeches follow a specified format, use exclusively source citations representing dominant white male perspectives, and lack the individual student's experience. As Barrett (1993) states, "never before has speaking been more important in America ... It's clear that in our time, people place high value on the need to have a voice. This speaking up and taking part involves persons of all cultures, origins, and walks of life" (p. 9). In order to develop their own voice, students need to incorporate their own experiences into their speeches (Wilson & Strohkirch, 1993). Next, what "public" are we preparing student speakers for? If asked, students usually answer "the class". Students, however, will rarely find such captive, passive, and homogenous audiences outside the classroom. When teaching audience analysis we need to prepare students for the types of publics they will face later in their lives.

Research in the Basic Course

Viewing the student as a knowledge constructor rather than a knowledge receiver (Brooks & Brooks, 1993) also enables integrating research into the basic course beyond simply including stories as content to be read and discussed. Students engage in inquiry about the issues and questions of the discipline suggested by research. Students, could raise questions, generate hypotheses, and investigate them using their own public speaking as a source of data. Investigating speaker credibility, audience appeals, or the like becomes part of the activity of the course. Similarly, in the "sound-bite" world we live in, public speaking is not often adequately represented in the media. Students could investigate the genres of public speaking in real world, outside of the classroom, contexts. Such an investigation also affords the opportunity to engage in critical consumerism of public speaking, a prospect that supports the idea of critical investigation suggested by Sprague (1992) and others. Our students are bombarded by ads and political speeches for which they should be trained critical consumers. In our society everyone is a consumer of rhetoric, only some of us are presenters. Giroux (1992) posits, "at its best, critical pedagogy enables teachers and others to view education as political, social and cultural enterprise. Critical pedagogy equates learning with the creation of critical citizens, rather than merely good ones" (p. 113).

Language constructs realities, it does not merely present or represent them. As instructors, we need to make this explicit by letting students investigate issues of class, gender, race, and ethnicity in their speeches; particularly as they relate to their own experiences. Because of this neglect we fail to provide students with opportunities to deal with topics which have real public (societal) implications. This neglect contributes to students lack of understanding and tolerance of difference, and prevents them from developing and articulating their own voice (Wilson & Strohkirch, 1993). In addition to sharing their personal histories and experiences they need the opportunity to critically evaluate dominant voices. Speech topics need to have implications for public policy, contribute to opinion formation, allow for discussion of differences, and expose students to a variety of voices.

Instructors would model this behavior by compiling reading packets containing articles representing several perspectives on topics such as: use of nonstandard language forms, feminist voice, ethics, gender, or public rhetoric. The entire class would read the packet of articles and discuss them. You might use this for a round of panel presentations, having each speaker explain the viewpoint in her/his assigned article and then opening up to the class for discussion. This should avoid those awkward moments in a regular speech class where the panel members say "Any questions?" followed by complete silence from the class. If others have read the same information they are better prepared to discuss and to engage in critical evaluation of various voices. In debriefing

each panel presentation and discussion talk about the articles/ research. If students disagreed was it the presenter's fault or do they disagree with the perspective? Did they feel the author(s) lacked credibility? If so, why? This may make the components of credibility and the importance of credibility seem more real. This should also provide opportunities to improve listening. Our students need to learn to suspend their own position long enough to hear another's position. Additionally, this should increase tolerance for differences. Finally, public speaking skills are still being taught, speeches are still given and critiqued. None of our traditional content is lost or slighted.

Instructors would continue to serve as role models of public speaking skills. When lecturing about delivery you would be conscious of fillers, speech length, rate of speech, volume, and vocal inflection. But also make this explicit by commenting on your own delivery, providing "good" and "bad" examples and asking the students how they felt when you used verbal fillers.

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